I am writing to voice my opposition to any requirement that the Washington State Ferry (WSF) system adopt security screening of passengers or their vehicles.

WSF functions as a part of Washington State's highway system; riders are primarily commuters or those engaged in commerce. There are two types of ferry vessels in use by WSF, auto and passenger-only ferries. Auto ferries are boarded either by driving onto the boat, or by walking on (no vehicle is required). The auto ferries carry commuters, commercial vehicles, tourists, etc. Passenger-only ferries are used primarily by commuters, and as the name implies, passengers walk onto the boats. In addition to commuters, the passenger-only ferries generally carry those attending 'special events' (sports events, festivals, etc.).

I have a very difficult time believing that a WSF ferry boat would be considered a prime target by a terrorist organization. There are too many other attractive, and easily accessible, targets in the area. More economically or emotionally symbolic targets would include any of our sports stadiums, the bridges that span our waterways, the downtown financial district (Seattle), the underground transit bus tunnel, the freeway system, the University of Washington, Pike's Place Market (a huge tourist attraction), etc. Any money that is available for increased security should be spent first on these types of potential targets. The financial & emotional impact of the loss of a ferry boat would be much less than that of a successful attack on any of the other potential targets I've mentioned.

The impact of security screening of vehicles & passengers using the ferry boats would be very large. During the busiest times of the day & on special event days, the turn-around time between sailings for both types of boats is barely sufficient to unload & reload the boats and late arrivals/departures are not uncommon. Any delay in loading and unloading, e.g., a stalled vehicle, an inexperienced captain docking the boat, etc., can result in late departures/arrivals. Implementing security screening of vehicles & passengers of WSF would be like implementing such screening for transit buses or the subway (passenger-only ferries) or our highways (auto ferries). The delays for people who need to get to work on time would be unacceptable. As a ferry boat commute makes for a very long day, arriving any earlier to board the boat on the way to work, or leaving the dock any later on the way home would impose an unacceptable burden (emotional & financial -- increased child care costs, for example) on most riders. The financial requirements for WSF would cause their costs to skyrocket, which would be passed on to the riders, including those business that rely on the boats for transport. Ridership would drop (increasing congestion on our already overloaded roadways), and fares would increase again to cover the lost revenue. In short, a death spiral leading to the end of WSF seems likely to me. The loss of WSF would result in huge negative financial impacts on individuals, businesses, & communities that rely on WSF for routine transportation. The communities on the west side of Puget Sound would bear the brunt of this impact and would be cut off from the east side of the Sound, i.e., Seattle.

In summary, I ask that you not require security screening of vehicles or passengers using the WSF system. The financial & emotional consequences of such requirements would be much worse than those incurred in the very unlikely event a terrorist attack is directed towards the ferry boat system.